

New substation opposed

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CEDAR CITY - Residents of the Three Peaks area plan to bring everyone they know to support their cause before the Iron County commissioners on Monday.

The county Planning Commission approved a conditional use permit in September to Rocky Mountain Power, allowing them to build a substation in the residents' neighborhood, and residents couldn't be more upset.

"Rocky Mountain Power's plan is expensive, ill conceived, illogical and illegal," said resident Kathy Flick. "Why are they doing this?"

Now both Rocky Mountain Power and residents have appealed the conditional use permit and will bring their cases to county commissioners.

The substation

Iron County Building Administrator Chad Nay said Rocky Mountain Power already has gone through the process and the Planning Commission approved the conditional use permit with several conditions.

A file for appeal is normal in this situation, Nay said. The company is seeking clarification and some modification.

"It's not out of the ordinary," he said.

RMP spokeswoman Margaret Oler said the company just wants clarification on the permit's conditions.

She said the substation is necessary to power Iron County because it's growing so quickly. Not only are more residents and businesses moving into the area, existing customers are using more.

"The demand for electricity is simply increasing," she said.

The substation is located in RMP's target area to meet electrical needs and access transmission lines; it's the location that makes the most sense.

"We understand that nobody likes to have electrical facilities in their backyard," she said.

Residents' biggest argument is they don't want a 40-acre substation in their backyard, which would be the biggest in Utah.

Oler said the substation will not take up the whole 40-acre property RMP bought. The actual substation will be 18 acres, with the whole facility taking up 21 acres.

Nay confirmed it's a big misunderstanding and the substation will only be about 20 acres.

"What we are trying to do here is provide safe, reliable, adequate service," Oler said. "That is what we have an obligation to do."

Residents' concerns

Resident Carol Pratt said 30 families live on 20-acre parcels in the area, and they don't believe this is the best site for RMP. The company didn't look for property long enough, and they're ignoring residents' concerns.

"We're not anti-development, we just feel that there are better alternate sites for RMP's transfer station," she said.

They even took the initiative to find five other sites in RMP's target area.

Flick appealed to Warren Buffet, president of MidAmerican Energy Holdings Co., which owns PacifiCorp, with a letter.

"Rather than utilize any of the extensive industrial lands available, Rocky Mountain Power proposes to build a 40-acre substation in the midst of our homes," she said. "We understand the

growth in Southern Utah demands more electricity, but our neighborhood does not need to be destroyed in the process."

Pratt's son, Michael, believes the Planning Commission was intimidated into approving the permit.

"It's a classical case of the big man stepping on the little man just because they can," he said. He also believes RMP made a mistake because it bought the property after looking for only three weeks.

"In my opinion, they're raising false alarms here," he said. "They don't plan to begin construction until 2008. I don't see why it's such an emergency that they buy this land and there's no other sites available to them."

Oler said the company is starting now because it's a long process to get a power substation online. RMP officials hope to have the substation working for the summer of 2009.

"It takes a considerable amount of time to do a substation," she said. "This is just bringing more electricity into Iron County to meet the needs."

Carol Pratt doesn't believe the county is fulfilling its responsibility to residents - it hasn't mitigated the problems sufficiently.

Residents are worried about light pollution and noise levels.

They're concerned about a possible fire; residents in the area get their water from wells and don't have fire flows.

They're also worried about a spill from the substation, which could hurt their water source.

RMP already supplies power to the area and Pratt doesn't believe the substation is as necessary as RMP makes it sound.

"RMP has used scare tactics and outright lies with the Planning Commission, implying that if they can't put their substation where they want to, the area will experience blackouts and brownouts," she said.

Nay said the conditional use permit was used to mitigate concerns.

"By putting on these conditions, we feel like we have mitigated the concerns to a level that best accommodates the general public," he said. "We've done our best with them."